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## St. Paul ready for its close-ups

### International media outlets stake out sites for GOP convention

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When the Republican National Convention rolls into town Sept. 1-4 at the Xcel Energy Center, St. Paul will play host to as many as 15,000 media members — everyone from Swedish broadcasters and French wire services to Comedy Central and Fox News.

Just what the city hoped for.

National media are setting their plans for the event, and St. Paul is busy trying to get some face time. Through the prism of network and cable coverage, locals will see their hometown broadcast across the globe.

But what will it look like?

One of the most visible channels will be MSNBC, which hopes to set up its political desk in Rice Park. Joining bronze statues of F. Scott Fitzgerald and "Peanuts" characters will be the animated duo of Chris Matthews and Keith Olbermann, anchoring a planned 20 hours of daily MSNBC coverage.

"We're looking for (Rice Park) to be a go-to place for the week of the convention," said MSNBC's vice president of communications, Jeremy Gaines, whose family has roots in St. Paul. "There definitely will be interaction between the crowd" and MSNBC's political

tandem.

MSNBC is doing something similar in Denver, a repeat of an approach to covering political conventions the channel began in 2004, when it set up an outdoor desk at Faneuil Hall in Boston and Herald Square Park in New York City.

Erin Dady, St. Paul's marketing director, said NBC executives snapped up the location almost immediately after seeing Rice Park.

"There is no more beautiful place in the city of St. Paul," Dady said. "We wanted to leverage that landmark in our city to our best advantage."

A heavily Democratic city, St. Paul has dismissed suggestions that it would rather be hosting the Democratic National Convention by saying either event brings an international spotlight to the city. As the convention draws near, that spotlight is starting to come into focus.

Matthews and Olbermann aren't the only ones for whom the network is scouting locations. Gaines is looking for a local diner from which MSNBC pundit Joe Scarborough can broadcast his "Morning Joe" radio program. And the Today Show is likely to send an anchor, though whether it's Meredith Vieira or Matt Lauer hasn't been determined.

Fox News is setting up a large tent, called the "Fox Experience," in a parking lot across from the Xcel Energy Center. The morning "Fox and Friends" show will broadcast from there, along with the company's radio and Internet offerings. At least one of the network's prime-time shows will broadcast out of the Xcel Energy Center, according to a spokeswoman.

CBS also is setting up inside the X and will send its "Evening News" anchor, Katie Couric, and lead

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political reporters Bob Schieffer and Jeff Greenfield to St. Paul. CBS Radio and [CBSNews.com](http://www.cbsnews.com) also plan heavy coverage of the convention.

ABC is also planning on using the Xcel Energy Center as a base for its coverage, originating "World News with Charles Gibson," "Good Morning America" and "Nightline" from the venue.

But there are still plenty of chances to film "beauty shots" around the Twin Cities.

"'The Early Show' will probably be doing pieces and live shots from around town, but we haven't nailed that down yet," CBS spokeswoman Sandy Genelius said.

Comedy Central is sending Jon Stewart's "Daily Show" to St. Paul's History Theater for the week, but a network spokesman said the channel's other popular politically tinged show, "The Colbert Report," won't be making the trip.

It is widely believed that CNN is renting the Eagle Street Grill across from the Xcel Energy Center. With round-the-clock news coverage, CNN and other cable news channels such as Fox News and MSNBC are going to have a lot of time to fill during the convention.

To fill that void, St. Paul and Minneapolis promoters are handing out packets of suggested shots to networks. Included is the "Spoonbridge and Cherry" sculpture in the Walker Sculpture Garden, the Stone Arch Bridge, St. Paul's High Bridge, Summit Avenue, the Cathedral of St. Paul and more.

"A big part of my focus lately has been working with national media to make sure they get outstanding customer service," Dady said. "This is why we wanted to host a convention."

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